Psycho Social Correlates of Happiness in Adults

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To be happy is one among the ultimate goals in life. It is a blissful experience that everyone can feel but cannot explain. 'Happiness' is a word where the meaning is known to everybody but the definition to which nobody can give (Jones, 1953). It is an umbrella concept for notions such as well-being, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, hedonism, eudaimonia, health, flourishing, life satisfaction, and so on. Throughout the history, from antiquity to the birth of the modern age, it has appeared that attainment of happiness has been the central concern among many philosophers, thinkers and writers. The ability to be happy and contented with life is a central criterion of adaptation and positive mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Happiness has numerous positive by products that appear to benefit individuals, families, and communities (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2004). Happy people gain tangible benefits in many different life domains from their positive state of mind, including larger social rewards like more friends, stronger social support, and richer social interactions (Harker & Keltner, 2001); superior work outcomes like greater creativity, increased productivity, higher quality of work, and higher income (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1995); and more activity, energy, and flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991). Subjective happiness may be integral to mental and physical health; happy people are more likely to evidence greater self-control and self-regulatory and coping abilities (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002); to have a bolstered immune system (Stone et al., 1994), and even to live a longer life (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001). Happy people are not self-centered or selfish; instead they tend to be relatively more cooperative, prosocial, charitable, and other-centered (Williams & Shiaw, 1999). Happy individuals appear more likely to be flourishing people, both inwardly and outwardly. The WHO recently defined positive mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own mental abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO, 2001).

Happiness is subject to change with the conditions and situations in people's lives. Previous research on happiness has identified a number of demographic, psychological as well as social factors that are correlated with happiness. However, not many researchers have explored this aspect in India, especially on the psychological variables. So, the present study was an attempt on this line, and was aimed at exploring the psychosocial correlates of

happiness among adults in our society. It is hoped that the findings of the study would provide a clear picture regarding the state of happiness among the adult population and will bring out the correlates of happiness, so that suitable programmes can be developed to promote the well-being and happiness of people, which will ultimately help to build a welfare society. Though there have been tremendous changes in the society in all spheres of life, not much research have been carried out to explore the influence of these changes in the happiness levels of individuals.

The problem for the study is titled as "Psycho Social Correlates of Happiness in Adults".

Objectives

The major objectives of the present study were:

1. To examine whether there are significant differences among the different age groups of adults (early young, late young, early middle , late middle) in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.
2. To examine whether there are significant gender differences among adults in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.
3. To examine whether there are significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among different groups of adults categorized on the basis of relevant socio demographic variables like religion, place of residence, education, occupation, income, type of family, marital status, age at marriage, length of marriage, children, dwelling pattern, engagement in organizational activities, and participation in religious activities .
4. To find out whether there are significant main and interaction effects based on gender of the adults and their marital status in happiness.
5. To examine the relationships that happiness has with satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect in adults.

6. To find out whether satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality , coping resources, and positive and negative affect are significant predictors of happiness, and the extent to which they predict happiness.

Hypotheses

Pursuant to the above objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed for the present study.

Hypothesis I

There will be significant differences among the four different age groups of adults in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

Hypothesis II

There will be significant gender differences among the different groups of adults in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect .

Hypothesis III

There will be significant differences among the adults belonging to different religious groups in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

Hypothesis IV

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults based on their place of residence.

Hypothesis V

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults based on their educational status.

Hypothesis VI

There will be significant differences among the adults belonging to different occupational groups in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

Hypothesis VII

There will be significant differences among the adults belonging to different income groups in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

Hypothesis VIII

There will be significant differences among adults belonging to different family types in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect .

Hypothesis IX

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized based on their marital status.

Hypothesis X

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their age at marriage.

Hypothesis XI

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their length of marriage.

Hypothesis XII

There will be significant differences between the married adults with children and those without children in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

Hypothesis XIII

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their dwelling pattern.

Hypothesis XIV

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their engagement in organizational activities.

Hypothesis XV

There will be significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their participation in religious activities.

Hypothesis XVI

There will be significant main and interaction effects of gender and marital status of the adults on their happiness.

Hypothesis XVII

There will be significant relationships between happiness, satisfaction with life gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality, coping resources, positive and negative affect among the adults.

Hypothesis XVIII

Satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, personality factors, coping resources, positive affect, and negative affect each will significantly predict the levels of happiness among adults.

Method

Sample

The sample comprised of 1513 adults (men= 561; women=952) belonging to the age range of 20 to 60 years. The subjects were drawn from various institutions, organizations and households of Thrissur, Ernakulam and Kozhikode revenue districts of the state of Kerala, using purposive sampling.

Tools

The following tools were used for collecting the relevant data

1. Personal Data Sheet

2. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002)

3. Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin,1985)

4. Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)

5. Life Orientation Test (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994)

6. Adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991)

7. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988)

8. Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991)

9. Coping Resources Inventory (Marting & Hammer, 2004)

10. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)

Analysis of data

The collected data were analysed using the following statistical tests

- Descriptive statistics
- Students's t- test
- Analysis of variance (one-way and two- way)
- Duncan's multiple range test
- Pearson's correlation coefficient
- Step-wise regression

Major findings

1. There are no significant differences among the four age groups of adults (early young, late young, early middle, and late middle adults) in happiness, gratitude, optimism, hope, agreeableness, and coping resources. However, there are significant differences among these groups in satisfaction with life, perceived social support, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, positive affect, and negative affect. The early young adults have higher levels of perceived social support, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, positive affect, and negative affect than the middle adults. The late young adults have higher levels of satisfaction with life and conscientiousness, than the early young adults.

2. There are no gender differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, optimism, perceived social support, coping resources, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and negative affect. However, there are significant gender differences in gratitude, neuroticism, hope, and positive affect. Males have higher levels of positive affect and hope where as females have high levels of neuroticism and gratitude.

3. There are no significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, perceived social support, extraversion, neuroticism, coping resources, and negative affect among adults belonging to different religious groups. However, there are significant differences in hope, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and positive affect among the adults belonging to different religious groups. The adults belonging to the Hindu religion have higher levels of conscientiousness compared to the other religious groups.

4. There are no significant differences between the urban and the rural adults in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, big five personality factors, coping resources, and positive and negative affect.

5. There are no significant differences among the adults belonging to different educational status groups in happiness, satisfaction with life, optimism, hope, perceived social support , extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, coping resources, and positive affect.

6. There are significant differences among the adults belonging to different educational status groups in their levels of gratitude, agreeableness, openness to experience, and negative affect. The higher educated group had higher levels of gratitude, agreeableness, openness to experience, and lower negative affect.

7. There are significant differences among the adults belonging to different occupational groups in their levels of happiness, gratitude, perceived social support, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, and positive affect and negative affect. Advocates have higher levels of openness to experience, agreeableness and positive affect. Teachers have higher levels of gratitude and perceived social support.

8. There are no significant differences among the adults belonging to different occupational groups in their level of satisfaction with life, optimism, hope, and coping resources.

9. There are significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, hope, perceived social support, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and negative affect among the adults belonging to different income groups. The high income groups have higher levels of happiness, satisfaction with life, hope, perceived social support, conscientiousness, and lower levels of neuroticism and negative affect than the low income groups. However, there are no differences among these groups in gratitude, optimism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, coping resources, and positive affect.

10. There are no significant differences in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, hope, perceived social support, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, coping resources, and positive affect between the adults categorized on the basis of their family type. However, there are significant differences in optimism and negative affect. Adults belonging to nuclear families have higher levels of optimism and negative affect than those belonging to extended families.

11. The differences between the married and the unmarried adults are not significant in happiness, optimism, hope, agreeableness, and coping resources. However, there are significant differences in satisfaction with life, gratitude, perceived social support, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience, positive affect, and negative affect between the married and the unmarried adults. Married adults have higher satisfaction with life and conscientiousness where as the unmarried adults have higher gratitude, perceived social support, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, positive affect and negative affect.

12. There are significant differences in happiness, optimism, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, coping resources, and positive affect among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of their age at marriage. The adults who got married late (31- 35 years of age) have higher happiness, extraversion, agreeableness, coping resources, and positive affect and lower neuroticism than those who got married early. However, there are no differences among these groups in satisfaction with life, gratitude, hope, perceived social support, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and negative affect.

13. There are no significant differences among the different groups of adults categorized on the basis of length of marriage in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, coping resources, positive affect, and negative affect.

14. Adults with children and those without children do not differ significantly in happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, big five personality factors, coping resources, and positive and negative affect .

15. Dwelling patterns do not have any impact on the happiness, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, extraversion and openness to experience of adults. However, there are significant differences in satisfaction with life, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, coping resources, and positive and negative affect among adults categorized on the basis of their dwelling pattern. Those who stay regularly at own houses have higher life satisfaction, conscientiousness, positive affect and coping resources, and lower neuroticism and negative affect than those who stay at home occasionally.

16. There are significant differences in happiness, gratitude, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and positive affect between the adults who actively participate in various organizations and the non participants. Those who participate in organizational activities have higher happiness, gratitude, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experiences and positive affect, and lower neuroticism than those who do not participate in such activities. However, there are no significant differences in life satisfaction, optimism, hope, perceived social support, conscientiousness, coping resources and negative affect between the two groups of adults.

17. Participation in religious activities like church attendance do not have significant impact on the happiness, satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, perceived social support, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, coping resources, positive affect, and negative affect of adults.

18. There are neither significant main nor interaction effects of marital status and gender in happiness.

19. Happiness among adults has got significant and moderate positive relationships with satisfaction with life, gratitude, optimism, hope, positive affect, all dimensions of perceived social support, all dimensions of coping resources, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Happiness is having significant and moderate negative relationship with neuroticism and negative affect.

20. Coping resources, satisfaction with life, neuroticism, gratitude, extraversion, positive affect, perceived social support, optimism, openness to experience, and negative affect are

found to be significant predictors of happiness among adults. The most important predictor was coping resources, followed by the variables as given in the above order.

The results are discussed in the context of available findings and the implications of the findings as well as suggestions for further research are presented in the final report.

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